

Grand Jury — County of Tuolumne

Tuolumne County Administration Center
2 South Green Street
Sonora, CA 95370

June 23, 2009

Warden Ivan Clay
Sierra Conservation Center
5100 O'Byrnes Ferry Road
Jamestown, Ca 95327

Dear Warden Clay:

Pursuant to state law the 2008-2009 Tuolumne County Grand Jury performed an inspection of the Sierra Conservation Center. The Jury also toured the Baseline Conservation Camp. Enclosed is a copy of our final report including findings and recommendations for your review. As a courtesy, you are receiving this report prior to its release to the public on June 30.

On behalf of the Grand Jury, I would like to thank you and your staff for the assistance provided to the jury members during our inspection.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dolores E. Blanchard".

DOLORES E. BLANCHARD, Foreperson
Tuolumne County Grand Jury 2008-2009

Enclosure

TUOLUMNE COUNTY

GRAND JURY

2008-2009

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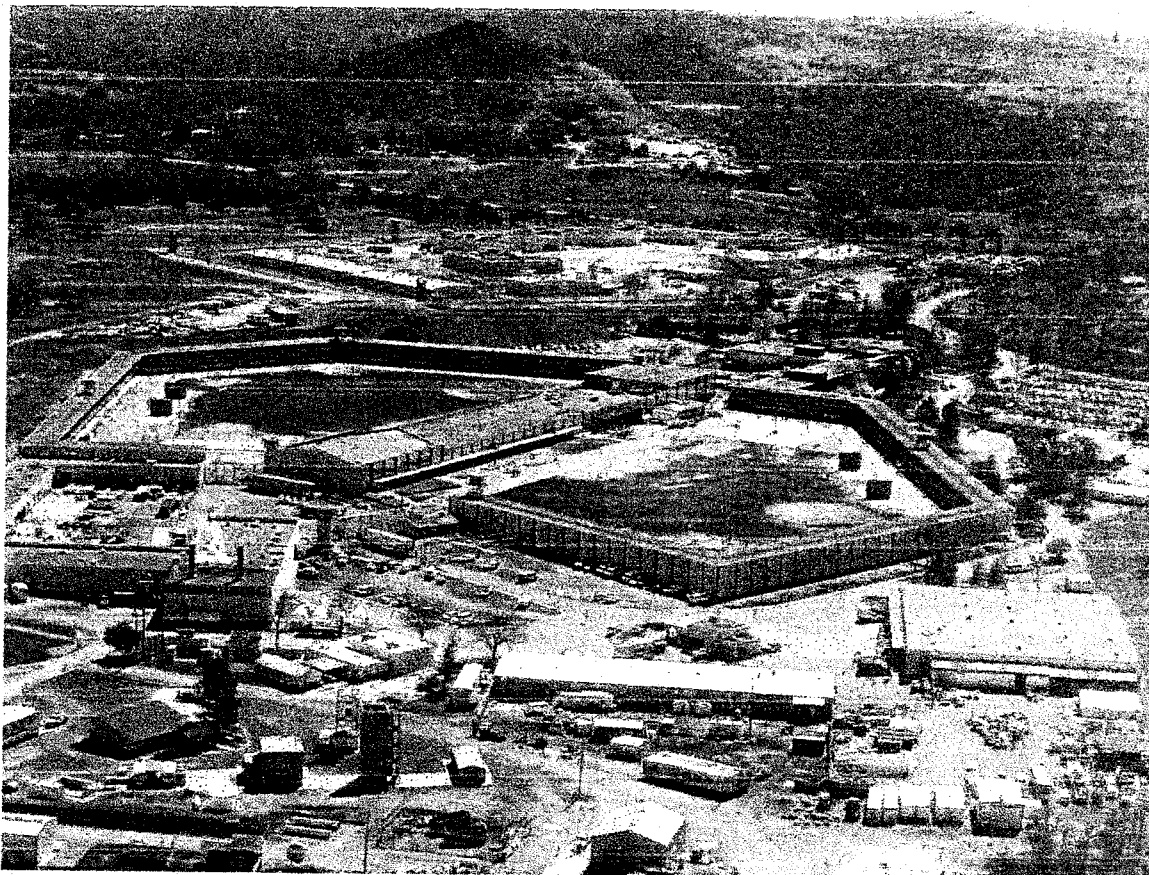


Photo of Sierra Conservation Center. *Photo used by permission.*

SUMMARY

The Grand Jury visited Sierra Conservation Center (SCC) in Jamestown for a mandatory inspection as well as a tour of baseline conservation camp. These facilities are operated by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR).

The SCC website states "The primary mission of Sierra Conservation Center is to provide housing, programs and services for minimum and medium custody inmates. SCC is one of only two prisons in the state responsible for the training and placement of male inmates in the Conservation Camp Program, SCC administers 19 male camps located from Central California to the Mexican border."

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The campus appearance, the staff's professionalism, the health care available to the inmates and the wide variety of programs available to the inmates were impressive. However, occupancy is at a level above the capacity for which the facility was designed.

Tuolumne County as well as state entities receive many benefits from having the facility located here. The benefits include jobs within the county and services for public entities.

GLOSSARY

Baseline Conservation Camp: Baseline is located five miles from the prison's main facility and is a joint CAL FIRE – CDCR operation.

CAL FIRE: California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

CDCR: California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

SAP: Substance Abuse Program

SCC: Sierra Conservation Center

SNY: Sensitive Needs Yard is a protective custody unit/yard for inmates who are unable to be housed with general population inmates due to various factors, i.e., their commitment offense (crime), gang affiliation and history while incarcerated.

BACKGROUND

The Grand Jury is required by California State Penal Code §919(a) and §919(b) to annually inspect any jail and/or prison facility located within the county limits. SCC is a state prison facility located at 5100 O'Byrnes Ferry Road, Jamestown, California 95327, Tuolumne County. The investigation primarily focused on inmate vocational and educational programs and the Substance Abuse Program (SAP).

APPROACH

In preparing for this investigation, the Grand Jury reviewed prior reports. The Warden gave a presentation regarding SCC to the full Grand Jury. The prison was visited twice. The third visit was to Baseline Conservation Camp.

DISCUSSION

On the first and second visits the Grand Jury inspected the administrative area, the two general population yards, the medical facility, the library and classrooms, the vocational program area,

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the Sensitive Needs Yard (SNY), the kitchen and food preparation area, the mail room, the prisoner Receiving and Release area and the dormitories. The third visit was to Baseline Conservation Camp where the Grand Jury members were shown the camp and given a typical meal that the inmates would receive while on a fire.

The following observations were made:

Housing

All dorms, designed to house 2,240 inmates, are housing 4,200 inmates which is over capacity. (see Appendix 1)

There is a system in place for fresh clothing exchange and the facilities were generally clean and orderly.

Mattresses are substandard, well worn, and not covered. The medical staff stated, despite the conditions of the mattresses, they had not seen any pattern of communicable skin diseases.

Health Care

Average cost is \$700/year/inmate. The cost is less than the insurance premium for a single individual or the cost of one visit to the Emergency Room.

Onsite Medical Clinic. Well managed and organized. Inmates are seen at the clinic by a Registered Nurse within 24 hours of submitting a written request.

Dental Care -14 staff dentists

Medical Care is provided on a daily basis by a staff of eight MD's, Physician Assistants, several Registered Nurses and Licensed Vocational Nurses. Evening, nights and weekends, a minimum of one RN is on the grounds and a MD on call.

Onsite X-ray

A new addition to the building is expected within 24 months resulting in more clinic space.

Food and Water

Clean drinking water is readily available in all areas of the prison

Cost \$2.61/day/inmate

Two hot meals and a bag lunch are provided daily

Balanced diet

Special needs diets are available

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Programs

Vocational Training

11 trades are available including carpentry, welding, masonry, electronics, graphic arts, auto mechanics and landscaping.

Inmates have completed projects for some county entities.

Educational Opportunities

Adult basic education General Educational Development (GED) preparation, some college classes, internet based distance learning classes, life skills and use of library.

The library and classrooms are on the second floor with no elevators. The planned addition for completion in the next 24 months will include an elevator which corrects this problem.

Substance Abuse Program (SAP)

Program designed to help inmates overcome substance abuse problems so they can successfully integrate back into society upon release.

Voluntary program

Baseline Conservation Camp (see Appendix 2)

CAL FIRE helps fund the camp.

Inmates perform various jobs throughout the county such as brush clearing, maintaining streams, cemetery, parks and trails.

Inmates fight fire and help with fire prevention during the fire season. An example, the fall of 2008 Southern California fire saved the state \$80 million.

During winter months inmates help with flood control.

Services are available to public entities

Substance Abuse Program (SAP) is a mandatory part of Baseline Conservation Camp. Inmates are motivated to be in the program. Successful completion of SAP reduces the return rate to prison from 70% to 30%.

Employee Morale

Employees are proud of what they accomplish within the constraints of budget and regulations.

A number of long-term employees stated that it is a desirable assignment within CDCR.

A large number of employees live in Tuolumne County.

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FINDINGS

- F1.** The Grand Jury found a well run and organized facility.
- F2.** The Grand Jury was impressed by the staff at SCC given the court mandates and the continuing limited budget.
- F3.** SAP, which is a mandatory part of the baseline conservation camp activities, is a very effective part of the rehabilitation program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1.** No recommendation
- R2.** No recommendation
- R3.** No recommendation

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

None

APPENDIX 1: from 2007-2008 Grand Jury Report

SCC opened in 1965 on 420 acres. It was originally designed to house 1240 inmates between two yards: minimum and low-medium security Levels I and II. In 1987 SCC expanded to include a 1000 bed, high-medium security Level III. Today, the prison houses approximately 4200 inmates with 2400 additional inmates housed at 19 conservation camps located throughout the state. SCC employs approximately 1400 staff members and has an annual budget of 145 million dollars. Inmate housing consists of three separate yards, or levels. Levels I and II are for general population inmates. The Level III yard had been a "general population" yard prior to 2007, but it has since been converted to a Sensitive Needs Yard (SNY) and is where the SAP operates. Due to prison overcrowding, a gymnasium (G-Dorm) between the Level I and II yards has been converted to house inmates with either physical and/or mental disabilities. The main medical facility is responsible for overall inmate medical treatment at SCC.

This facility also houses the pharmacy and dental clinics. The Level III yard is equipped with its own medical, dental and pharmaceutical dispensing facilities because of the security level of the inmates housed there.

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APPENDIX 2: Notes from Baseline Conservation Camp visit

Baseline Conservation Camp is located at a remote location west of Jamestown off O'Byrnes Ferry Road. It is laid out with single-story buildings and workshops arranged to follow the rolling hills within a small valley setting. The facility has a number of unique features and programs suited to support CAL FIRE and Tuolumne County.

Fire Fighting Capabilities

Provides 24-hour "fire ready" fire fighting teams that can be assembled as a "strike team" in less than ten minutes after an alert to support ground fire fighting operations throughout the county and mutual aid support in other state locations.

Seventeen member "crew trucks" based here are serviced and maintained at the automotive shops on a 24-hour basis.

A helicopter pad and water buckets staging complex is set up here to support the "air operations" center at nearby Columbia Airport.

The dormitories support typically 134 inmates for normal operations. Capacity to support up to 200 fire fighters in a fire camp staging area can be achieved.

The camp has a "sew shop", one of three statewide, which has unique capabilities to make and repair numerous fire support items. They produce items requiring the use of Nomex (fire resistant fabric in "turnout bags"), chain saw covers, back packs, embroidered name tags and other specialized items that provide rugged and fire resistant characteristics.

The camp has a "saw shop" where complete 24-hour maintenance is provided to returning crews and departing crews. All small gasoline powered chain saws, weed eaters, and other small hand tools are serviced and repaired. Specialized firefighting tools are also maintained here.

Inmate Rehabilitation Programs

SAP is an eight year old program. It is the primary tool that sets the demeanor of the facility and is a volunteer program in high demand by inmates who have less than 5 years of confinement time left to serve.

SAP participants have a 30% recidivism (return rate) record. This is one of the reasons that security measures are less stringent for the inmates assigned to Baseline Conservation Camp.

Inmates have a full day's work schedule when on campus (6:00 a.m. through 5:30 p.m. work day) and SAP classes in the evening with lights out at midnight. Inmates are checked for attendance every two hours by custody staff.

The camp is racially integrated and provides opportunities for inmates to work, train and condition themselves for the difficult job of fire fighting.

The cost of meals is similar to that of the main prison at \$2.56 per day. A separate increased budget is used for fire meals where more calories and larger meal portions are provided.

This facility is an excellent model for the state prison and appears to provide a solid path to rehabilitating individuals while providing much needed CAL FIRE support.